

Stanisław Jaworski

"Z teorii i praktyki awangardyzmu",
Andrzej Lam, Warszawa 1976 :
[recenzja]

Literary Studies in Poland 7, 143-147

1981

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bulistic, hallucinatory poetry, the sources of which are to be sought in the 17th-century poetry as well as in surrealism, and the "pure poetry" – detached from the real existence of man, poetry "of language which gives up its communicative function to become a value in itself" (p. 249), poetry of impersonal constructional and formal ingenuity. Such a situation Hutnikiewicz qualifies as symptomatic of a crisis.

The structure of modern lyrical poetry is in Hutnikiewicz's opinion (the essay "Struktura liryki współczesnej") a consequence of chaos and destruction characteristic of the 20th-century culture and civilization; to the shaken order of the world art reacts with strengthening its own order. The distinctive traits of this poetry are economy, rigorism and colloquialism—as in Różewicz's case, and essentiality—as in Ważyk's case, for instance.

Finally, in the essay on the structural transformations of the 20th-century narrative fiction the author attempts at demonstrating that the crisis of conventional plot structures is only apparent. In his outline of the evolution of these structures from the 19th-century novel to the fiction of 1918–1939 he seems to argue that every new stage in the evolution of a literary genre appears to be a crisis in relation to the already existing habits.

Sum. by *Alina Siomkajło*

Transl. by *Maria-Bożenna Fedewicz*

Andrzej Lam, *Z teorii i praktyki awangardyzmu (The Theory and Practice of Avant-gardism)*, Warszawa 1976, pp. 126. Series: Rozprawy Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.

In his book entitled *The Polish Poetic Avant-garde and Its Programme in the Years 1917–1923* Andrzej Lam described the initial period in Polish avant-garde poetry—the origins and interplay of changing tendencies. He stressed the fact that it was the theoretical concepts of symbolism which prepared the way for the later break-through in poetry. The book only dealt with the problem up to the year 1923, when Peiper's ideas were gaining widespread popularity and when it

looked as if poetry might be leaning towards constructivism. However, the following year—1924, that of Breton's first manifesto, brought about an upheaval in European poetry and created a new situation for the avant-garde movement.

Andrzej Lam's new book may be therefore regarded as a continuation of his previous work. The author now centres upon the further transformations of the avant-garde movement and on the search for a definition of the concept of avant-garde which might include newer trends.

With time, we begin to see the poetry of the first half of our century in a different light—the old divisions and oppositions are no longer valid and are replaced by new similarities and convergencies. Lam therefore aims at widening his scope of observations in two directions: firstly breadthwise, expanding the concept of avant-garde so as to include

[...] all the trends and artistic attitudes which, by consciously exercising radical innovation, opposed mimetic art and the mechanical repetition of artistic conventions in the name of a creative attitude towards reality and inventive formal solutions.

In this way the concept combines two trends: the irrational (spontaneous) and the rational (intellectual), that is expressionism and constructivism. The second direction in which the concept is to be enlarged is vertically, diachronically. The aim is to find a formula which would enable us to cross the bounds of a given period. This is why a new notion is put forward—that of “avant-gardism.” It should designate an attitude rather than a trend, an attitude which in the course of literary history was characteristic of “trends which had clearly defined contours, such as futurism, expressionism, surrealism, the so-called Cracow avant-garde and a number of others.” The notion thus becomes separated from its historically determined, short-lived denotations, and though it may not be timeless, at least covers a much longer span of time.

Lam believes that the appearance of an avant-garde reflects the violation of the natural order of the world. Man now faces a dilemma: “either his works must be as perfect as the works of nature, or else the disturbed equilibrium of nature will turn against him.” Such a situation arose in the second half of the 19th century and Lam considers modernist art to be the first attempt at finding a way out of

the problem, for it expressed "the will to discover the latent intelligence of nature, subconscious psychic forces, elementary instincts." The connection between symbolism and avant-garde art is now seen in a new light as a deeply rooted genetic bond. When looked at from this point of view, avant-garde art is a new attempt at solving the same problem – this time by bringing the products of civilization to such a high degree of perfection that "the realm of artificiality might measure up to those perfect self-regulating mechanisms which nature was able to produce without man's interference." The need for producing such mechanisms in social life required a new conception of art, which was to be a model of a sophisticated, artificial organization.

Pierre Francastel tried to explain the antimimetism of 20th-century art by pointing out that man's contact with nature was becoming more and more indirect through machines and other products of civilization. Lam also reasons along these lines, but he interprets this relationship not only in terms of its origin, as Francastel did, but also in terms of its function, for the new art was to accustom men to that type of relationship (which was in fact in agreement with Peiper's principles). In the division of social roles avant-garde art was therefore assigned the mission of creating "the realm of artificiality."

If understood in this way, "avant-gardism" can apply to literature right up to the present day. The issues which gave origin to this term are still of interest to us now. However, its nature has changed. For if we take it to be "the reflection of a revolutionary situation against a broader background," the eagerness to see radical changes in the relationship between the individual and the community, in the means of social communication and in the "relation between nature and culture," then we have to admit that the author is right when he states that nowadays other issues are more important: "reflections on the consequences of progress, its effect on morality, man, and nature."

The evolution of the avant-garde in the inter-war period is seen as the transition from the experimental stage to the "accent on individuality," from the approval of the present to disclosing its imperfections when compared with the future. And so what matters is not so much a new technique, but a new conception of personality.

This is considered to be at the origin of the change in Przyboś's poetry in the 1930's. It consisted in the adoption of a new, functional concept of form, seen as the result of a collision of the subject with the outside world. This new approach treats personality not as a ready-made set of qualities, but as something which is being constantly shaped by all it comes into contact with.

The author's intention is not so much to provide a detailed description of historical transformations as to construct a model which might disclose all the potentialities of avant-gardism. For instance when he writes about Przyboś's prewar works he also discusses his later articles, collected in *Sens poetycki (Poetic Meaning)* which was published in 1963. The reason for this is that Przyboś's views from that period represent the extremity point of a certain attitude of his, and can therefore best serve as an example of model opposition to Peiper's views.

In the latest studies on the history and transformations of the avant-garde movement a major role is attributed to surrealism. Lam's analysis confirms the fact that it was one of the most important trends in 20th-century European thought, and that no systematization can leave it out. The experience of surrealism—a trend which recognized the situation of the individual in a mass society—is gaining significance in Polish literary criticism. Andrzej Lam formulates his definition of the avant-garde in such a way as to include surrealism. He also tries to construct a syncretistic definition of surrealism, i.e. one that would apply not only to the activity of Breton's group. The following are the elements which should be present in such a definition:

An inclination for unexpected combinations of words, images and metaphors which violate perceptive habit patterns; an accentuation of the role of the subconscious, of imagination and oneiric visions; a predilection for grotesque absurdity which gives rise to a new logic of symbolic paradigms; the interchangeability of the categories of grimness and humour; the eagerness to denounce, a provocative attitude towards the passive identification of the image of the world with accepted conventions.

However, surrealism presents certain methodological difficulties: constructive trends can be perceived as part of a whole whose ideal consisted in perfecting the products of civilization, whereas surrealism opens the door to a new phase, marked by critical reflection on the consequences of progress. The affinity between the two trends becomes more evident in the 1930's. Lam in fact tends to see surrealism as

a trend which "occupies just as privileged a position in avant-garde art as symbolism does in modernist art" and possesses all the most characteristic features of 20th-century art.

In Polish literature the avant-garde tradition came alive again after 1956. However, at the same time the opposition between its two constituents—*austere poetry* and *extravagant poetry*—became more distinct. Lam therefore studies the relationship between the inter-war avant-garde model and the poetry of Różewicz (he points to its links with one of the expressionist trends, to the intermediary role of Czechowicz's poetry, to its distrust of cultural conventions). He sees the connection between the poetry of Herbert and avant-garde art in the fact that it "destroyed the popular conception of the world, negated the existence of objects in their familiar shapes, rejected the musty sentiments with which they had become overgrown." Apart from the change in the way of approaching an object, he voices a protest against sentimentalism and advocates "emotional restraint."

The arsenal of avant-garde tradition, which stocks contemporary poetry is thus rich in all sorts of means. The author enumerates here the conviction that all conventions have a contractual character, the obtaining of special effects by provoking a clash not only between words from very different semantic fields but also between various styles, the simultaneous presentation of various times and places (inherited from futurism), "the wealth of connotations accompanying the perception of an object" which allows to introduce objects from everyday life. The author aims at a compact presentation of new aspects of 20th-century poetic innovation and of unexpected relationships between its various forms which up till now had been treated separately—and this makes Andrzej Lam's book a valuable guide to the complicated problems of avant-gardism.

Sum. by *Stanisław Jaworski*
Transl. by *Agnieszka Kukulska*

Ryszard Przybylski, *Eros i Tanatos. Proza Jarosława Iwaszkiewicza 1916–1938* (*Erôs et Thanatos. La Prose de Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz 1916–1938*), Warszawa 1970, pp. 367.

Bien que publié il y a dix ans, le livre de Ryszard Przybylski est jusqu'à ce jour l'unique ouvrage qui étudie la prose de Iwaszkiewicz.